

Town of Amherst Public Works Committee  
minutes of October 28, 2004 meeting  
Bangs Center, Glass Room, 7:00pm

present: Vince O'Connor, Doug Lowing, Guilford Mooring, Rob Crouner, Mangala Jagadeesh (observer)

#### 1. Preliminaries

Doug convenes the meeting at 7:10pm. The meeting will cover Fall 2004 Town Meeting warrant articles on downtown sidewalks, Jones Library crosswalk, Larkspur Drive, and Atkins Corner.

Vince submits in letter form some comments clarifying the committee's role in the Larkspur Drive issue. It is agreed that this item will be taken up last in case a representative of the neighborhood arrives late.

#### 2. Jones Library crosswalk

Guilford provides background: Several years ago, Town Meeting voted against placing a crosswalk in front of the library, based on information provided by DPW among others. The current petition is asking to revisit that decision and update the feasibility data. There are three midblock crosswalks in the downtown area, which seem to be working well - contrary to the findings of studies in other states. Guilford states that "good engineering judgment" is against placing crosswalks anywhere other than intersections, but nothing legally prevents it. The argument for the crosswalk is that since people will be crossing there anyway, no matter what happens, it should be made as safe as possible.

Vince would like to see safety lighting at both ends of a crosswalk, if one should be built, and would avoid making the crosswalk raised because of the potential for distraction. Vince would also prefer that pedestrians not be appearing on a crosswalk from between parked cars, recommending nub-outs that Guilford believes would result in the loss of at least one parking space on each side of the street (Vince thinks all library-side spaces might be preserved). Guilford further states that a crosswalk would have to be wheelchair-accessible.

Guilford states that a crosswalk-feasibility study would be a small, in-house project with no specific price tag attached. Vince moves to recommend the article; Rob seconds; the committee approves 3-0.

#### 3. Atkins Corner

Vince would like discussion to clarify that (a) the engineering proposed by this article would include putting electric utilities underground so as to clear up sight lines and (b) this does not have anything to do with potential rezoning of adjacent parcels. Vince notes with regard to (a) that the town cannot spend water or sewer surplus or chapter 90 funds on electrical work. Guilford states that the area covered by the study would extend 200 feet in all directions from the intersection and all the way to Country Corner Road on the south side.

Guilford explains that the only "plans" for the area are contained in a concept book prepared using an EPA grant. Hampshire College, Atkins Farm, and neighbors were involved in the process. Many options were considered, but no decisions were made. The study requested by the article is required to keep the current phase of the project, an \$800,000 Congressional set-aside for engineering design, on schedule. The town needs to put its share up front before work can proceed. The design work itself would not require any zoning changes, and the recommended plan does not envision them either.

Bay Road and/or West Street would be bent somewhat from their current paths, and there would have to be land takings to accommodate this. However, road design is still very much up in the air. There may be roundabouts, medians, turning lanes, splitters, boulevards, etc. The road would be expanded to 30-32 feet wide from the current 24 feet to provide for bike lanes and shoulders.

The overall cost of the project may reach \$8-10 million, due to known problems of contaminated soil, presence of wetlands and endangered species, water quality considerations, relocation of road, and almost two miles of road construction. The town would contribute somewhere between \$40,000 and half of the total, depending on grants and reimbursements.

Vince moves to support the article strictly to study the utilities improvements; Rob seconds; the committee approves 3-0. A short statement should be prepared for Town Meeting.

#### 4. Larkspur Drive

Guilford advises the committee to stick to "big picture" public works issues and not get involved in smaller decision-making. Vince believes the committee should be open to commenting on Town Meeting petition articles, of which he does not think there will be many. Vince points out that the Public Works Committee was originally brought into being specifically to address public works planning issues in Cushman Village.

Guilford suggests looking at the question of whether the town ought to change traffic patterns in the neighborhood. If so, there is more than one way to do that on Larkspur. Vince, on the other hand, would first decide whether a cul-de-sac could physically be done. If not, the article is moot. If it is possible, however, then the committee should look at the larger picture of traffic patterns and present some details to inform Town Meeting's decision.

Doug notes that emergency access through a cul-de-sac could be impossible if not kept plowed on the development side. Response time in the neighborhood is already compromised. Doug states that there could be a new road into the neighborhood through the old sanitary landfill, though resolution of that situation is a long way off and a new road may not ever happen. Guilford mentions that there is a third owner of the Larkspur roadway: a small section between town and developer property.

Rob recommends taking a macro-view of the issue: Should the town consider changing the traffic patterns in Amherst Woods the way this article would do? Doug observes that taking a macro-view would lead to examination of traffic studies. Vince states that the two studies most recently done in this area are already outdated. Vince further mentions that there is a loop section of Old Farm Road that should be straightened out to make traffic on that road better.

The committee agrees to continue discussion at the next meeting. Vince's letter will be the framework of an agenda, and residents of both Old Farm Road and Larkspur Drive will be notified.

#### 5. Downtown Sidewalks

Guilford describes the history and current status of the sidewalk project. The pieces and priorities of the project have changed over time. The current \$250,000 borrowing will cover the Bangs-Kellogg/North Pleasant-to-Main (east side) sections. The defeated \$1.2 million borrowing would have added the west side of North Pleasant from Main to Kellogg and both sides of North/East Pleasant from Kellogg to Triangle. There would have been a second phase costing \$800,000 to cover other sidewalks in the downtown area, and both phases would have included work on some outlying sidewalks.

Vince objects to using borrowed money to pay employees, but Guilford suggests looking at it as though the town were hiring a contractor (the DPW) bringing his own work force, which would go away when the job was completed. (It is anticipated that some of the temporary hires would be folded into the permanent staff when retirements leave vacancies. There would always be a total of four "temporary" staff, however.)

Guilford states that the current plan, beginning with the \$250,000 borrowing, is sufficient to accomplish the entire project, provided enough money is appropriated every Spring at Town Meeting in order to keep it going. The proposed additional borrowing is intended to guarantee that the sidewalk budget does not run out of money.

After discussion of the costs of various sections of the project, Vince suggests that a five-year borrowing of \$500,000 (rather than a ten-year borrowing of \$1.2 million) might be palatable to Town Meeting if the areas to be covered were carefully specified in the proposal.

Vince suggests that a sidewalk maintenance plan should be established so that repair does not again become a big project in the future. Guilford states that the DPW is almost finished with an inventory of all the town's roads and sidewalks, which will enable such a plan to be implemented.

#### 6. The meeting is adjourned at 9:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rob Crowner